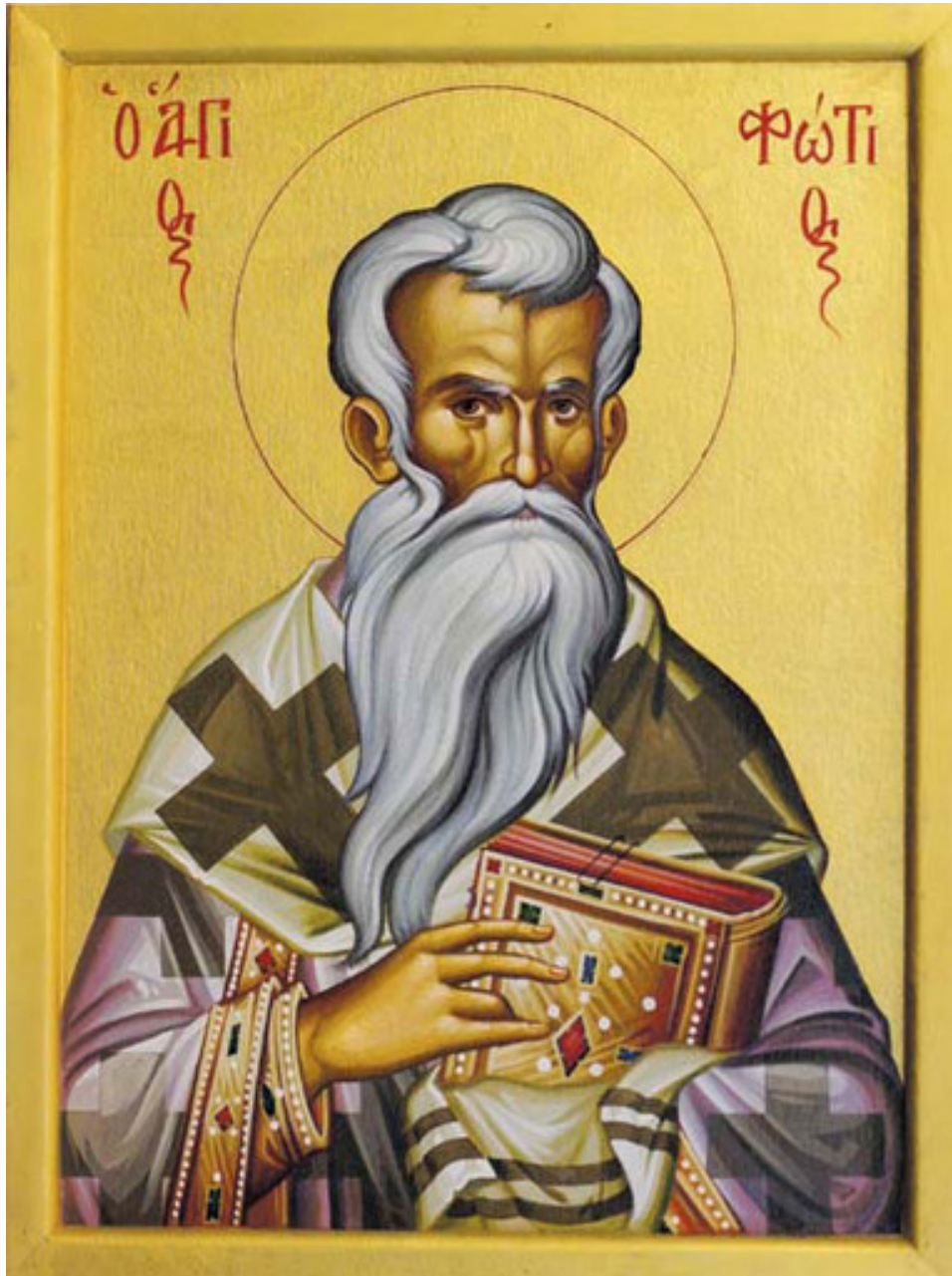
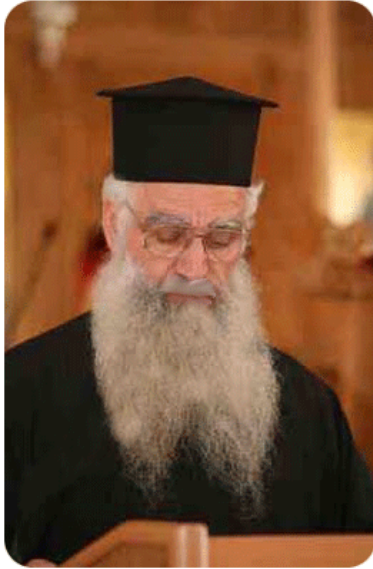


**Are the Armenians Orthodox?**  
**St. Photios the Great's Positions**

**Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis**



## Foreword:



The Armenians are a noble and heroic people who have paid a great price of struggle and sacrifice to secure their right to historical existence. From this point of view, we Greeks treat them with much sympathy because we feel that we are like-minded and that historically and in other aspects of life, we are related, all the more so since they are also Christians.

But there is another crucial aspect of the issue that has to do with their ecclesiastical identity, according to which we traditionally consider Armenians as heretical Monophysites. Nowadays, when everything is relativized and diluted, and tradition does not play a decisive role, this tends to be covered, forgotten and altered by another view, which in the context of Christian Ecumenism reduces differences to extinction and exaggerates similarities to gigantism. According to this view, Armenians have always been Orthodox, just like us, and the differences that divide us are insignificant and insubstantial. This is the basic guideline of the ongoing Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Anti-Chalcedonians, to whom the Armenians belong.

But are the Anti-Chalcedonians Orthodox? We tried to answer this question in a previous study, which has already been published in this series [i.e. *Kairos*] on the [“Orthodoxy” of the Anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites](#).

This present booklet deals with whether Armenians are Orthodox based on the teachings of St. Photios the Great. This paper was announced in November 1994 at the established annual Theological Conference organized by the Holy Metropolis of Thessaloniki, which had as its general theme the person and work of the Great Photios. The title of the paper at the conference was: "Photios the Great and the Union of the Armenians with the Orthodox Church."

Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis

## 1. Foundation and Organization of the Armenian Church

According to their tradition, the Armenians received Christianity from the apostles Jude and Bartholomew, who are considered the founders of the Armenian Church. It is historically accurate that Christianity was spread in Armenia in apostolic times, without its presence there being subsequently interrupted. However, its spread was limited to a few communities, with no visible and historically known ecclesiastical organization.



This limited spread of Christianity in Armenia during the first Christian centuries justifies the activity in the 3rd century of the great Armenian saint, [Gregory](#), who worked actively for the Christianization of the inhabitants and the organization of the Church with the help of Greek clergymen, who accompanied him after his consecration as bishop by the Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, Leontius, in the year 302. Gregory had fled to Caesarea earlier, receiving a Greek education and becoming a Christian. He was the only member of his family to survive the massacre of the Persians, who occupied Armenia in the first half of the third century and imposed Parsiism by force. Gregory began his missionary work in Armenia, to which he returned in 261 AD. He was so successful that he won over the ruler of Armenia, Tiridates III, who in 301 made Christianity the official religion of Armenia. Armenia thus became the first Christian state and took over from the great Roman Empire, which, in a few years, by the divine arrangement and inducement of Constantine the Great, would recognize the previously persecuted Christianity as an official religion and become the first and only ecumenical Christian state in the history of the world.

Gregory became known as the "Illuminator" of the Armenians, as he remained famous in church consciousness and historical memory, connecting the Armenian Church through Caesarea of Cappadocia, from which he was long dependent, with the Eastern Orthodox Church, which acquired in the mid-4th century its ecclesiastical Center, Constantinople, whose throne was decorated and overhauled by the Great among the wise



and theologians and patriarchs Photius, whose person and work we seek to illuminate in the present bright indeed symposium. The impression of the success of the work of St. Gregory the Illuminator in Armenia was so great that it made St. Athanasius write around 318 that it appears to be the triumph of Christ from subduing the peoples of inaccessible lands, such as Armenia.<sup>1</sup>

Until the 4th Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451), Armenians were members of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. They participated with their representatives in the first three ecumenical councils, which they still recognize as ecumenical, and developed their worship, theology, monasticism, and administration unified with the other churches. After the re-subjugation of their country to the Persians in 428 and its transformation into a Persian province, their great patriarch Sahak (Isaac) the Great (378-439) strengthened internal reactions to the foreign occupation by stimulating the self-consciousness of the Armenians through ecclesiastical reforms, especially by supporting Mesrop Mashtots in creating the Armenian alphabet of 36 letters and thus laying the foundations for the development of Armenian Philology. Mesrop, the creator of the Armenian language into which he translated the Bible and the Church Fathers, based on Greek and Syriac originals, went on to become Catholicos (patriarch) of the Armenians and died in 440, only eleven years before the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon, which is the separating milestone in Armenian relations with the Orthodox Church.

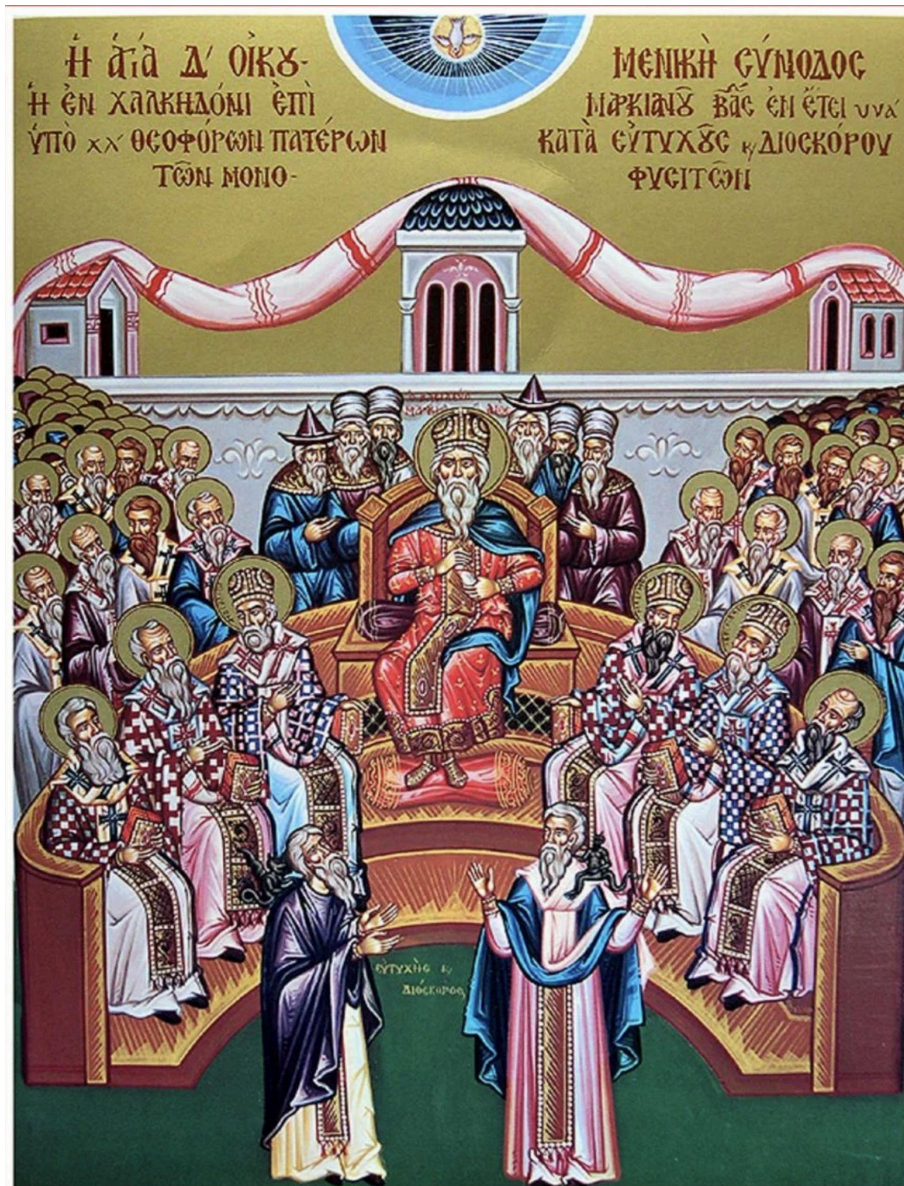
## **2. Separation from the Orthodox Catholic Church**

Preoccupied with warfare against the Persians even during the work of the 4th Ecumenical Council, the Armenians did not take part in the theological discussions on the Christological question, nor did they have direct knowledge of the theological trends and concerns that led the Council to condemn Eutyches's Monophysitism and repeat Nestorius's condemnation.

Seduced by Syrian Monophysite bishops, they formed the opinion that the 4th Ecumenical Council, in condemning Monophysitism, slipped into the separatist dyophysitism of Nestorius, which is the opposite of Monophysitism. At the same time, the Definition of the 4th Ecumenical Council also shows that the latter had adopted the middle and royal way, between the divisive Christology of Nestorius and the confusional Christology of Eutyches, establishing the orthodox unitive Christology of the hypostatic union of his two natures in the one person of Christ, unconfusedly, unchangeably,

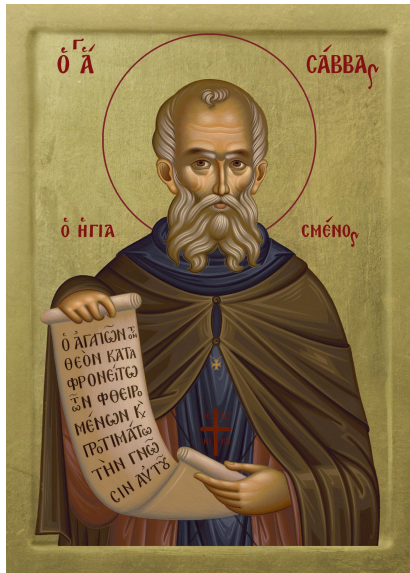


indivisibly, inseparably. They isolate and misinterpret the well-known phrase of Saint Cyril of Alexandria, “one incarnate nature of the Logos,” and believe that the council abandoned the teaching of Saint Cyril and was carried away by the Nestorian teaching of Saint Leo, Pope of Rome, annulled the 3rd Ecumenical Council and reinstated Nestorianism, which, it should be noted, the Council condemns along with Eutychianism.



It is a fact, however, that Monophysitism and the rejection of the 4th Ecumenical Council extended to Armenia since they were also established by decisions of Armenian bishops' councils in Vagharshapat in 491 and Doven in 527 (or 535 in other cases), although there were also advocates of the Council of Chalcedon among the Armenians, such as the

Catholicos John Mandakuni (478-490) and after him other Catholicos, who, in repeated attempts at unification until the fall of Constantinople, recognized the 4th Ecumenical Council and denounced Monophysitism.



These unification efforts, although they did not finally lead to the unification of the Armenians as a whole with the Orthodox Church, nevertheless contributed to a significant number of Armenians joining and remaining within the bosom of the Church. Many Armenians have settled in the Orthodox monasteries of Palestine since the 6th century. The monk Nikon Mavrovitis (11th century) relates that St. Sava the Sanctified allowed the Armenian monks to “chant the liturgy in the Armenian dialect,” except for the Trisagion Hymn, which had to be sung in Greek, to avoid the possibility of adding Peter Fuller’s ‘God-suffering [Theopaschite]’ phrase ‘Thou Who was crucified for us.’ Several Armenians living in Greek centres did not follow Monophysitism but remained

Orthodox, while others reverted to Orthodoxy, as already mentioned. All of them were called Helleno-Armenians (Hayhurum). From these Armenian Orthodox came the Armenian emperors, empresses, generals and other officials of Byzantium, and many saints of the Church. Armenian historians believe that the Hayhurum (Armenian-Roman) survivors up to the massacres of 1915 are Armenian Chalcedonians, i.e. Armenians by descent and Romans, Ottoman Greeks, by faith, while Greek historians believe that they are simply Armenian-speaking Greeks, i.e. Orthodox of Greek origin, who are only linguistically linked to the Armenians, remnants of soldiers of Xenophon and Alexander the Great.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Firm Treatment of Armenians as Heretics

The non-Chalcedonian Armenians, i.e., those who rejected the 4th Ecumenical Council and all subsequent ecumenical councils, have, as a matter of course and consistently in all historical periods since their separation, been included by the Orthodox Church among the Monophysites and characterized as heretics.

The same treatment, as we shall see, is also found in Photios the Great, who managed to restore many Armenians to the bosom of the Orthodox Church. The Armenians

themselves acknowledge their Monophysitism, contrasting it with Orthodox Dyophysitism, which they consider heretical because they identify it with the separatist Dyophysitism of Nestorius.<sup>3</sup>

For the stable treatment of the Armenians as heretics, we only mention the following. In the canonical responses of John, Bishop of Kitrous, to Archbishop of Dyrrachium Constantine Cavasilas, who, around the end of the 12th century, asked, "If it is allowed for the Armenians who live in certain cities to build Churches without any hindrance, should they either be prevented to do so or be allowed to build them as they wish?" The answer included, which, on the one hand, reveals the supra-ethnic universal spirit of Byzantium, but on the other hand, also shows the soteriological stance, originating from genuine Christian love, of avoiding the mixing Orthodox and heretics. The text states, "Those living in these dwellings may feel marginalized due to being judged for their heresy. On the other hand, limit their interaction with Christians and encourage them to gradually transition away from their beliefs, at least for some individuals, as many as have loved salvation." This exciting answer in its entirety is as follows: "In Christian regions and cities, it is customary for different language-speaking and heterodox peoples, such as Jews, Armenians, Ishmaelites, Hagarenes, and others, to reside separately from Christians. Therefore, specific areas are designated for each of these groups within or outside cities, and they are forbidden to extend their residences beyond these boundaries. Early rulers initially devised this separation for three reasons. Firstly, to make those living in these areas feel marginalized and excluded due to being judged for their heresy. Secondly, to limit their interaction with Christians and encourage them to gradually transition away from their beliefs, at least for some individuals, as many as have loved salvation. Thirdly, they should ensure that their activities produce beneficial results for those devoted to their way of life. Thus, when residing in designated areas, the Armenians are allowed to build temples and practice their faith undisturbed, just as the Jews and Ishmaelites dwell in Christian cities. If they exceed the limits of their designated residency, not only will they be prohibited, but their constructions, no matter how grand, will be destroyed, for it has long been lost the permission to freely and openly engage in such activities."<sup>4</sup>

This conscience of the Orthodox Church regarding the Armenians as Monophysite heretics has been retained and reaches our days. The well-known historian Archimandrite Basil Stephanides, in his textbook of *Ecclesiastical History*, after establishing that in Syria, where Nestorianism had prevailed in principle, "the opposite heretical teaching took its place, monophysitism"<sup>5</sup>, includes in it its extreme expression by Eutyches, whom



it should be noted that the Armenians and other anti-Chalcedonians have no difficulty in condemning. With this, they misjudged the Orthodox not to be Monophysites, but also the moderate of Severus, whom they honoured as a saint and teacher, thus remaining moderately even Monophysites. Stephanides begins the section on the Armenians. "The Armenians, apart from the monophysite ideas, have the following differences," which he then mentions.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. The New, Unorthodox Treatment of Armenians as Orthodox



Curiously, since the end of the last century, a position has begun to emerge that is entirely contrary to this long-standing, synodically established and confirmed tradition of the Church by many great saints, including Photius the Great: the position and view according to which the Armenians in principle, who are of interest to us here, but also the other Anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites, Syro-Jacobites, Copts and Ethiopians, with whom the Armenians are united, are not Monophysites, nor heretics therefore, but have the same Orthodox faith as us. Their separation and tearing away from the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are not due to theological reasons, that is, to our differences in faith, but rather due to historical and political

reasons and partly to a different understanding of Christological terminology.<sup>7</sup> In other words, it is due to Byzantium's unfavourable policy towards these peoples, which forced them to separate from the united Orthodox Empire, and to the inability of theologians on both sides to get beyond words and terms, which they understood differently, and to stick to the facts, to the content.

Following these assessments, it is easy to see that non-theological reasons prevailed not then but now. At that time, unity in faith, an essential ecclesiological position and requirement, had been adopted by the genuine Christian state, which was fully aligned with the Church, as a fundamental condition for the unity of the state. Now that the world has broken up into numerous state units from a political point of view, which nevertheless tends towards political unity, the non-theological and unacceptable ecclesiological view

cultivated in particular within the World Council of Churches considers that the churches, following the states or the world theologically, must unite, not by first ensuring unity in faith and truth (union in truth), but by maintaining their differences (union in falsehood). According to this view, which has been expressed and is expressed by the well-known branch theory and other newer theories, none of the existing churches, not even the Orthodox one, is entitled to claim exclusivity in the succession of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, which is composed as a single tree by all the divided churches, as branches of this tree. Of course, the simplest farmer who does not have the wisdom of this theory's proponents knows that when a branch is cut off from the tree trunk and is not nourished by the same juices that circulate in the tree, it dries up. If, before it withers, it is planted and sprouted, it forms another separate tree, it grows near the tree of the Church and does not belong to it, it is "shunned," and this is the case with heresies.

The strict and severe treatment of differences in faith is now considered a medieval attitude and behaviour, incompatible with the mentality and trends of our time, a characteristic of a few fanatics and zealots, who, by their insistence on matters of faith, do much harm, e.g., to the Coptic brothers of Egypt, who are left alone and unprotected in the flood of Islamists in Egypt or weaken the side of the Orthodox within the World Council of Churches, who would be more powerful, against the numerous and powerful Protestants, if the Anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites were added to the Orthodox.

But apart from these clearly non-theological reasons, put forward by a secularised and adaptive theology, there is a bottomless theological egoism in this attitude, alien to the Orthodox ethos, to the ethos of the saints and the Fathers of the Church. The Fathers of the Church, basing themselves on the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, respect the Tradition of the Church, and "following the holy Fathers before them"--who in Ecumenical Councils infallibly formulated the faith in terms--do not attempt to remove "the eternal boundaries which the Fathers set" nor innovate in matters of faith, no matter how wise and philosophical and intelligent and educated they may be to the world. They put their wisdom and knowledge at the service not of subverting but of consolidating the faith, which is thus found in wondrous unity throughout time in the teaching of the councils and the teaching of the Fathers. It has been rightly observed that there is such unity among the seven ecumenical councils that it seems as if they were seven mere sessions of a single council. Each one follows the preceding one, the truth of which it confirms and continues, and all together express the truth of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

# ORTHODOXY

## THE TREE OF LIFE

## ARE YOU IN THE TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST?

I observed Satan falling as lightning from heaven. (Luke 10, 18)

### THE GREAT SCHISM: 1054 AD

This took place when the Bishop of Rome who is also known as "THE POPE" broke off from the True Church because he wanted to be the head and started to change elementary teachings of Christ that were forbidden to be changed. Prior to this, the Church was united for about 1000 years. Three of the Pope's main heresies are the 'Filioque', his supposed 'Supremacy' and 'Infallibility'.

CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (Ephes. 5:23)

**THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION: 1517AD**  
This took place when the German monk Martin Luther and his people strongly disputed and protested against the "Roman Catholic Institution" for changing the True Teachings of the Church. But instead of returning to the Pioneer Orthodox Church, they created their own man-made "churches", which continue to disagree and split among themselves because they are false and they don't have the Holy Spirit to guide them. Today there are over 2,500 Protestant Groups and 33,500 different denominations!

### IS CHRIST DIVIDED? (1 Cor. 1, 13)

For this reason the time will come when they will not endure Sound Doctrine, but (will devise teachings) according to their own desires, because they have itching ears; they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the Truth and be destroyed by fables. (2 Tim. 4, 3-4)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from The Faith, giving attention to deceiving spirits and doctrines of Demons! (1 Tim. 4, 1)

Twisting the Scriptures to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3, 16)

Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. (2 Thes. 2, 15)

I AM the Path, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. (John 14, 6)

If any one does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and withers; and they (the demons) gather them, and thrown them into the fire and they are burned. (John 15:6)

"We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1, 16)

### SOME EARLY HERESIES (FALSE TEACHINGS)

GNOSTIC (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Cent.)  
ARIAN (4<sup>th</sup> Cent.)  
NESTORIAN (5<sup>th</sup> Cent.)  
MONOPHYSITE (5<sup>th</sup> Cent.)  
ICONOCLAST (5<sup>th</sup> Cent.)

(Heresy is the corruption and distortion of truth, it is a false, twisted teaching that is contrary to the Teachings of Christ and is not part of the genuine Apostolic Faith and Tradition. Heresy forms blasphemy against the Holy Spirit which is a sin that is never forgiven! (Math. 12, 31)

I will build My Church on this rock and the gates of Hell shall not overpower it. (Math. 16:18) (in the Original Greek, the word "petra" translates as "rock" and does NOT refer to Peter himself, but to the confession of faith that Christ is the True God)

I am with you always, even to the end of the age. AMEN (Math. 28, 20)  
Jesus Christ is the same Yesterday, Today and Forever. (Heb. 13, 8)

THE EASTERN  
ORTHODOX  
CHURCH  
(INBI)

The faith which was ONCE for all delivered to the saints. (Jude 3)

\*All Orthodox Creedal formulas, liturgical texts and doctrinal Statements affirm the claim that the Orthodox Church has preserved the original Apostolic Faith, which was also expressed in the common Christian tradition of the first centuries.  
ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA.  
# article on Eastern Orthodoxy

### The Orthodox Miracle Of The Holy Light

Inrefutable evidence of the Truth of the Orthodox Church is an event that has been occurring annually in Jerusalem for nearly 2000 years. Various Christian religions perform their individual Easter Prayers around the Tomb of Christ. However, when the Orthodox Patriarch enters the Cave (which has been thoroughly searched), while holding 33 candles, symbolic of the 33 years of Christ, an unexplained phenomenon occurs: Flashes of light suddenly appear from nowhere and light up the candles held by the Patriarch as well as other candles held by the faithful in the crowd. Many expert Scientists (such as Pyro Analyst Andre Alexandrovich Volkov), who officially researched this event in 2008) have given a responsible testimony confirming that the appearance of the Holy Light is unexplainable and is beyond the laws of nature. This fact has drawn so much attention that it is now being televised world-wide and is also streamed live over the internet: [www.holylight.gr/](http://www.holylight.gr/) and [www.oodeg.com/english/ekstical/holylight.htm](http://www.oodeg.com/english/ekstical/holylight.htm) (excellent 30min. video)

ONE LORD,  
ONE FAITH,  
ONE BAPTISM  
(Ephes. 4:15)

The Church of the Living God, the pillar and support of the Truth (1 Tim. 3:15)

The Holy Spirit will guide you (the Church) to all Truth\* (John 16:13)

ONE HOLY,  
CATHOLIC\*  
& APOSTOLIC  
CHURCH

\* (Catholic means it has the wholeness of Truth & Grace of the Holy Spirit)

I will build My Church on this rock and the gates of Hell shall not overpower it. (Math. 16:18) (in the Original Greek, the word "petra" translates as "rock" and does NOT refer to Peter himself, but to the confession of faith that Christ is the True God)

WORLD COUNCIL OF "CHURCHES" - ECUMENISM (Pan-Heresy - The Chariot of the Antichrist): 1948

"Be careful that no one deceives you." (Mth. 24, 4) Created By Andrew Tsoumanekas (1962 - 1994)





The acceptance of the position of the Armenians and other Monophysites that the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon slipped into Nestorianism, led astray by Saint Leo, pope of Rome, offends the unity of all councils, past and following. This view presents contemporary theologians as more capable of understanding the theological terminology of the Monophysites and not misunderstanding it, as the holy Fathers of the Councils misunderstood it and considered it heretical, but also other gigantic and colossal theological and patristic personalities who dealt with the Monophysites, such as St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John of Damascus, and Photius the Great, who have been expressing and sealing the Church's teaching in an uninterrupted and unified series for three centuries, as the most eminent theologians of those

centuries [i.e., St. Maximus of the seventh, St. John of Damascus of the eighth, and Photius the Great of the ninth century]. And even if one does not take into account the holiness and illumination of the Holy Spirit, which immediately distinguishes them from modern theologians, who are usually distracted and surrounded by secular turmoil, their astonishing constitution and insurmountable epistemological equipment alone make them giants before whom we must feel like dwarfs. So, did these giants not understand the Christological terminology of the Anti-Chalcedonians and unjustifiably accuse them of the stigma of heretics? And do we now understand it better if we consider them homodox and Orthodox, so there is no need for theological dialogue but a simple declaration of union?

I realize that the time counted for all my proposals is also running out, and we must see how Photius the Great dealt with the Armenians. However, since the study of his related works clearly shows that his positions constitute a fundamental reversal of the course and findings, even the smallest ones, of the theological dialogue conducted today between the Orthodox Church and the Anti-Chalcedonians, it is much more important to understand this than to present at length the relevant teaching of Photius the Great, which can also be done in a longer form of the paper or an independent publication, without of course this meaning that the basic positions of Photius the Great will not be presented here, even briefly.

## **5. The Contemporary Theological Dialogue with the Anti-Chalcedonians Overturns the Orthodox Tradition—Doctrinal Confusion.**

It is necessary to say, however, that the attempt to declassify the Armenians and other Anti-Chalcedonians as Monophysite heretics and to present them as always Orthodox. At the same time, it was merely the personal opinion of a few theologians, and therefore not particularly worrying, is nowadays the main party line on which the official Theological Dialogue of the Orthodox Church with the Monophysites is proceeding. Due to this course of action, it meets the justified opposition of some autocephalous churches, Mount Athos and individual theologians. The Anti-Chalcedonians, without abandoning their two basic positions, the rejection of the 4th Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon and the non-enumeration of the two natures of Christ after the union, which are sufficient for them to be considered as Monophysite heretics, managed, by putting forward feeble theological arguments—which are pulverized by Photius the Great—to lead the Orthodox members of the Committee of Dialogue to the position that the two churches have inherited the same apostolic faith and tradition and that they are two families of Orthodox Churches. In fact, concerning the name of the Anti-Chalcedonian Churches, which was a topic of discussion in the Dialogue, the Anti-Chalcedonians, through their insistence, succeeded in no longer being called Monophysite Churches or Pre-Chalcedonian Churches, but in the first instance accepted to be called Ancient Eastern Churches.

They then asked to be called merely Orthodox Churches. They did not accept a compromise proposal of the Orthodox to be called Eastern Orthodox non-Chalcedonian Churches; they asked for the elimination of the non-Chalcedonian Churches and are now called Eastern Orthodox Churches in the Dialogue, thus confirmed by the name of their *de facto* non-existent Orthodoxy. These processes within the framework of the Theological Dialogue have had and have, as a consequence, created the commonly known *confusio*, genuine confusion, according to the confusing Christology of the Anti-Chalcedonians. The names Orthodoxy and Orthodox no longer characterize only the traditional Orthodox Churches, fully united in faith, worship and administration, headed first by the honour of the ecumenical throne of Constantinople, which have at their head the ecumenical throne of Constantinople as their first honour but also by the Anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites. Thus, within the World Council of Churches, the Orthodox are identified with the Monophysites, and we are all collectively called Orthodox, participating in joint "non-Orthodox" committees. But the most unpleasant thing is, after this mitigation, we ourselves are also forming Orthodox committees and drafting joint texts with the Monophysites as Orthodox texts.



Therefore, in this confusion, which was created by the relevant studies of some theologians and by the theological processes within the framework of the Dialogue, it is not surprising that all this has been passed on to theological research and teaching in our theological schools, but also in our more general attitude towards Monophysites. It is worth noting, for example, that while our Faculties do not grant doctoral degrees either to Roman Catholics or to Protestants or other non-Orthodox, they did grant them to Coptic theologians. In professors' studies, it is written that the Monophysites of Egypt are not heretics but schismatic, even invoking St. John Damascene, whose teaching is misinterpreted.<sup>8</sup>

In the same context of approach to the Monophysites, there is an attempt to prove that the Tome of the Fourth Ecumenical Council in Chalcedon is not influenced by the teaching of St. Leo of Rome, whom the Monophysites consider Nestorian but by St. Cyril's teaching, as if there were a difference between St. Leo and St. Cyril.<sup>9</sup>

## **6. Armenians are Heretics. Renunciation of Error and Return are the Only Possibilities for Union.**

Fortunately, however, in the face of this confusion, there is the clear and lucid teaching of the holy Fathers, which will ultimately be valid as a criterion and guideline.

The works and teachings of the Great Photios related to the Armenian issue have not been sufficiently utilized and have yet to fertilize modern theological thought because they remain unknown.

Photius the Great is indeed a tremendous prophetic figure, sent by God in difficult times for the Church when papal absolutism, relying on the rising political power of the Frankish rulers, sought to intervene within the limits of the autocephalous churches' jurisdiction, as was done in the case of Bulgaria, and simultaneously to challenge the validity of established doctrines by innovating in matters of faith. They did this by abolishing the synodal system of administration of the Church and proclaiming itself a self-sufficient and infallible institution in matters of faith.



The reaction of Photius the Great is well known. Ignoring the political correlations with purely theological criteria, he fought for the purity of faith and the preservation of the apostolic-traditional synodal system of administration of the Church. At the same time, with his excellently planned missionary work, he dynamically spread the preaching of the Gospel to the Slavic peoples, expanding the Orthodox Church geographically and strengthening it with new populations. This dynamic planning, certainly as a pastoral responsibility for the salvation of people within the Church, included, in addition to unbelievers and non-believers, heretics who, according to the teaching of the Church put forward by Photius the Great, if they do not return to the Church and remain in heresy, lose their salvation. Therefore, the pastoral sensitivity of the Church for the salvation of people outside her is not limited to missionary work towards non-believers but also extends to heretics. This double dimension, evident in the work and teaching of Photius the Great, has disappeared in our days because the boundaries between Orthodoxy and heresy have been abolished, and those previously considered as heretics are "churches", and even "sister churches", so the union is not considered as their return to the Church, but as a union of the churches, as it has been wrongly established to be called by all of us, for in this way we "ecclesiasticize" heresies and equate them as churches with the Church.

Indeed, it has been recorded by history, and it emerges from the testimonies of St. Photios himself and other writers that there was a successful attempt in principle for the Armenians to return to the Orthodox Church. During his first patriarchate, Photios sent letters to the Armenian ruler Ashot and their Catholicos Zacharias, which were distributed by the Metropolitan of Nice, John. In these letters, which have been preserved in Armenian and Latin translations, he urged their union with the Orthodox Church. At a synod of Armenian bishops held in the city of And [?Avτ] in 864, the Armenians recognized the 4th Ecumenical Council and rejected Monophysitism.<sup>10</sup>

St. Photius refers to this return of the Armenians in his well-known [\*Encyclical Letter to the Eastern Patriarchs\*](#), in which he denounces the Pope's interventions in Bulgaria and the illegitimate addition of the *filioque* to the symbol of faith. The reason for this reference to the relevance of the text is that he wants to show that the Church, after the condemnation of the old heresies, was going through a period of peace and spiritual fruitfulness.

In fact, with Constantinople as its centre, from which the springs of Orthodoxy flow, souls were irrigated throughout the world, especially where drought and rainlessness had

prevailed, and the countries where heresies had prevailed had been transformed into desert and barren areas, as happened with the Armenians. This exciting text alone shows that Photius the Great considers the Armenians as impious heretics who were lured into heresy by the Jacobites since the 4th Council of Chalcedon and have been in error since then and are not Orthodox. The only possibility to unite with the Church is to renounce error and curse all their patrons and teachers, extreme and moderate:

“In particular, the inhabitants of Armenia were entangled in the heresy of the Jacobites and boldly rejected the right proclamation of orthodoxy, yet after that well-attended holy council of our fathers assembled at Chalcedon, where your prayers came to our aid, they were enabled to reject that long-standing error. Today, the region of the Armenians worships in a pure and orthodox manner the worship of Christians, joining the catholic church in loathing Eutyches, Severus, Dioscorus, and those others who threw stones at piety, Peter and Julian of Halicarnassus and all their scattered offspring, and in subjecting them to the unbreakable bonds of anathema.” **11**

This union of the Armenians did not last long. The deposition of the Great Photios from the patriarchal throne prevented the completion and consolidation of this effort. This is evident from the testimony of Patriarch Nicholas Mysticus, who repeated the effort some fifty years later, in 918-920. Writing to the Armenian ruler, he refers to Patriarch Photios and his failed attempt, which he attributes to ‘the sudden change of fortune.’

"On this matter, my Father — I mean Photius, the most holy Patriarch — spent much trouble, partly by letters, partly by dispatch of envoys, although circumstances denied his efforts a successful outcome." **12**

At the same period, Arethas of Caesarea, in response to a letter from the Armenians, says that many great and illustrious men wrote in favour of piety and, by their struggles, made the opponents responsible. He includes Photius the Great, whose wisdom, boldness, organization, and efficiency he praises since he shows that many Armenians were persuaded and joined the Church: «Μέθ' ὧν καὶ ὁ χθες τε καὶ πρῶην ἱερός μεν το γένος, ἱερώτερος δε τὴν σοψίαν, ὅση τε θεία καὶ ὅση τῆς κατ' ἀνθρώπους λογίζεται. Τίς οὗτος; Ὁ τοῖς οὐρανίοις ἀδύτοις τὰ νυν ἐγκατοικιζόμενος Φώτιος ὅς τοις κατὰ ταῦτα εἰκαιολογούσι τῶν Ἀρμενίων υμῶν γενναίῳ λόγῳ καὶ θεοφιλεῖ ψυχῇ παραστήματι καὶ ἀνανταγωνίστῳ γνώμῃ καὶ διαρκεῖ σαφῶς ἐφορμήσας εἴλε μεν τῶν ἀντιπάλων ὅσον φιλήκοον, ὅσον εἰς σύνεσιν οὐ παρέσφηλεν, ὅσον ταις ἀποθήκαις ἢ τοῖς σταθμοῖς του

θεοῦ δίκαιον ἐναυλίζεσθαι»<sup>13</sup> [Tr. Note. This Greek language style is tough for me to translate. I could not find an English translation of this text anywhere.]

## 7. Unused and unknown texts of the Great Photios against the Armenians.

From these two testimonies, it appears that Photius wrote or made speeches, "but this is also the mission of men," and that against the erratic and speculative arguments of the Armenians, he countered with "a brave word," a "God-loving presence of soul," "an unrivalled and lasting opinion." Two long letters of Photios are indeed preserved in Hellenistic form, Nos. 284 and 285 in the new edition of the Leipzig letters by Laourdas-Westerink. In particular, the first one, entitled *Against the Theopaschite Heresy*, is a very long treatise consisting of 3294 verses, which, as Photios the Great admits, was extended "beyond measure" (3189) because he had to respond to the extensive letter, "longer than the Iliad" (3190), of the Armenian ruler, Ashot I, which contains all the arguments of the Monophysites against the Fourth Ecumenical Council, "the idle excuses" of the Armenians, as characterized by Arethas, which were refuted by St. Photius.

It has been rightly observed that what the treatise *On the Mystagogy of the Holy Spirit* is for pneumatology, so is *Against the Theopaschite Heresy*<sup>14</sup> to Christology. However, while the first is well-known, and all the literature since Photius on the emanation of the Holy Spirit is based on it and has been studied and evaluated repeatedly by modern theological research, the second remains wholly unknown and unused. The most important thing is that all the arguments and positions that are still presented today in the Theological Dialogue by the Anti-Chalcedonians, before whom the Orthodox Theologians, inside and outside the Dialogue, feel at least embarrassed and condescending, are treated with the same method, force and persuasion that we know from Photius' classic work *On the Holy Spirit*. It is, of course, impossible to give here a theological analysis and presentation of this work, which is indeed unique in Christology. However, due to its great importance and the unfortunate turn that the Theological Dialogue took, it is an urgent necessity for this work to be published in translation with a theological introduction and appropriate theological commentary so that it can be utilized by modern theological research and contribute substantially to the ongoing Dialogue from the Orthodox point of view. Although we are all burdened with many other occupations and have a heavy burden on our shoulders, I hope to respond to this task with the Grace of God.



The other epistolary treatise, [\*Letter to the Armenians\*](#) No. 285 in the new Leipzig edition, is much shorter and consists of 479 verses. But it complements St. Photius' teaching with new positions.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, it must be pointed out that ignorance of these letters and, therefore, of the relevant teaching of St. Photios is mainly because the letters were not included in the older editions or P.G. of Migne. They were published in 1971 by Darrouzes in REB, from which the Leipzig edition took them.<sup>16</sup>



## Epilogue

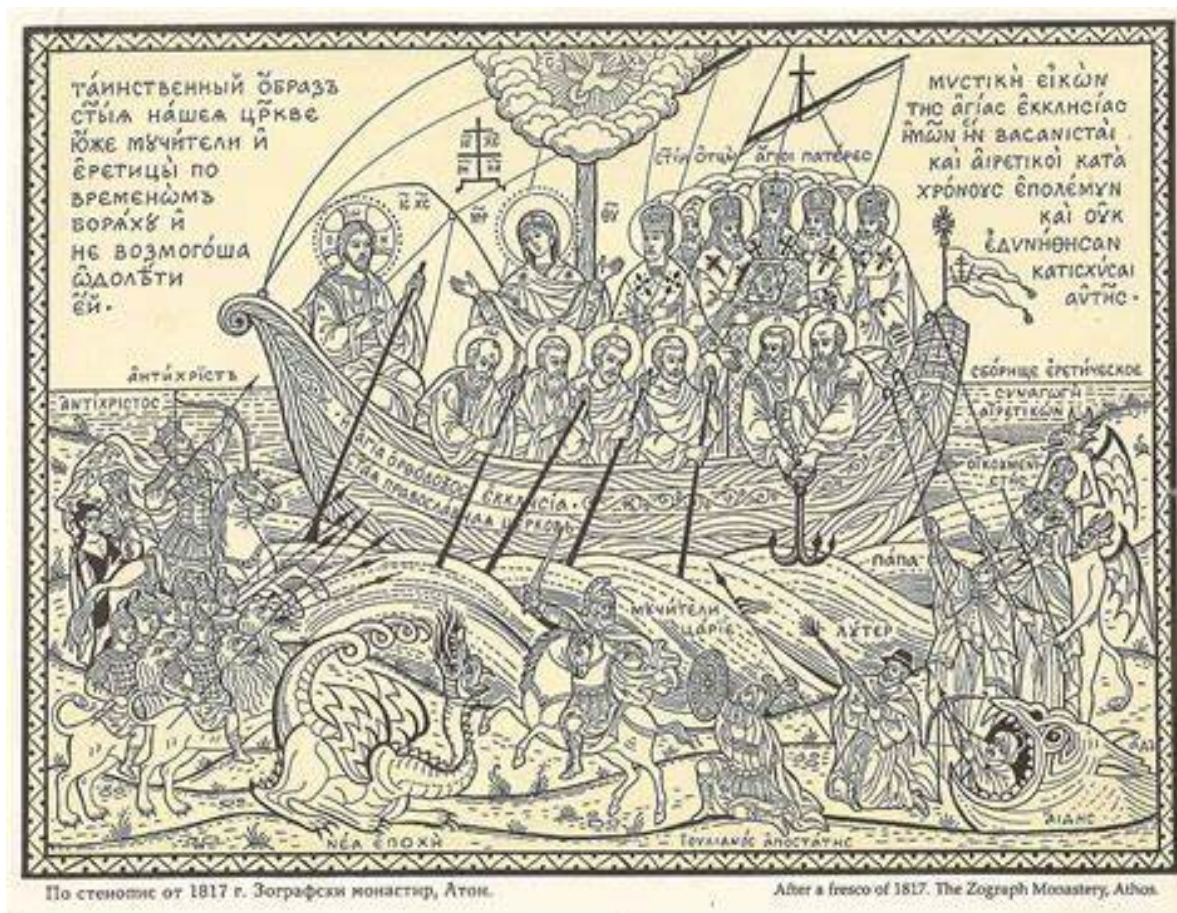
Armenians are a noble and amiable people. They stood shoulder to shoulder with the Greeks under challenging times, facing the same cruelty from foreign conquests to the last shameful massacres in the first two decades of our century. Fifty thousand Armenian refugees, along with our fellow ethnic refugees from Asia Minor and Pontus, found



warmth and refuge in our country, where they lived with honesty, diligence, and prosperity.

The great Photios treats them most amicably on a human and secular level. He repeatedly calls Ashot a friend and relative. He points out, however, that matters of faith and truth move into another dimension, not in the realm of temporary expediency, but in the realm of eternity, the entrance to which is guaranteed not by schism and heresy but by the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. He writes to him, "May it not happen to you, a delightful adornment of friendship and kinship, neither to you nor to anyone else, by whom the name of Christ is invoked, under any circumstances to be subjected to such a test from there, nor to undergo such examination, and then come to learn the truth, so that no longer is there any need to experience a bitter punishment."<sup>17</sup>

This other reality, this other dimension of truth, was always the criterion of the Saints and the Great Photios, which is why they were adamant in matters of faith and truth.



## NOTES

1. See. M. Athanasius, [\*On the Incarnation of the Word\*](#) P.G. 25,188.
2. See Archim. Vas. Stephanidou, *Ecclesiastical History, from the Beginning to the Present Day*, Athens 1959, p. 243. Hratch M. Bartikyan, *Hellenism and Armenia*, Athens 1991, p. 63-65.
3. See, e.g. Hratch M. Bartikyan, *ibid.*, p. 61: "The attitude of the Byzantine authorities towards the Armenians of Byzantium was not uniform. It depended on the confession of faith of the Armenians. The behaviour of the Byzantines towards the monophysite Armenians and the adherents of Dyophysitism was completely different. The monophysite Armenians, who represented the absolute majority of Armenians in the state, forming communities, remained marginalized, unlike the Chalcedonian Armenians, who, being Orthodox like the Greeks, enjoyed all the rights of Roman citizens."
4. G. Ralli - M. Potlis, *Constitution of the Divine and Sacred Canons*, Athens 1855, vol. 5, p. 415.
5. Archim. Vas. Stefanidos, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
6. *op. cit.*, p. 220
7. This view is echoed in the extensive article on "Armenia" in the *Religious and Ethical Encyclopaedia* (vol.3, pp.167-195) by Athanasios Arvanitis, who, referring to the doctrinal teaching of the Armenian Church, justifies the discomfort of the Armenians when they are described as Eutychian and Monophysites, and attributes their separation perhaps to reasons of foreign policy, rather than doctrinal teaching: "The root of this misfortune is fundamentally the refusal to accept the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon as Ecumenical, a fact that provoked its schism from the universal Church. As noted in the relevant section, this is due mostly to the political anomalies that prevented it from participating in said Council. Perhaps also due to dissatisfaction with Marcian and Pulcheria, who did not assist the Armenians against the Persians, it unleashed an anathema against that Council, thus stemming from external political or doctrinal reasons."
8. N. Matsouka, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, Thessaloniki 1992, pp.35-36. For the actual position of St. John Damascene, see our study, [\*The "Orthodoxy" of the Anti-Chalcedonian Monophysites\*](#), Thessaloniki 1994.
9. G. Martzelos's study, *Genesis and Sources of the Definition of Chalcedon*, represents this trend. [\*Contribution to the historical-dogmatic investigation of the Oros of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod\*](#), Thessaloniki 1986, whose conclusion is that "the Definition of Chalcedon in its doctrinal content is not only in accordance with the Christology of Cyril but has an evidently Cyrillic character," p. 221. In this regard, see. See also B.

Fanourgakis, [\*The Cyrillic character of the "Term of Chalcedon in the Dialogue of the Orthodox Church with the Ancient Eastern non-Chalcedonian Churches—the treatment of the issue in ecclesiastical literature\*](#), Thessaloniki 1993.

10. See Elder Daniel Katounakiotis "To Hieromonk Hieronymos Against the Armenians." This letter of the wise and enlightened Elder Daniel, one of Mount Athos's significant figures in recent years, is published in volume 5 of his series of collected works, entitled [\*Expressions from the Desert\*](#), p. 49-71. It refutes the views of Archimandrite Polycarpus Psomiados, the later high priest, who precisely one hundred years ago, at the end of the last century, claimed that "the Armenian Church differs only in customs and forms from our Orthodox Church and that reasons not essentially dogmatic took them away from us." The relevant epistolary treatise of Elder Daniel to Hieromonk Hieronymos is dated March 24, 1892.

Patriarch Photios himself gives information about the success of this effort to return the Armenians to Orthodoxy in his letter to the ruler of the Armenians, Ashot, entitled [\*Against the Theopaschite Heresy\*](#): "So we wish to obtain the goal of our exhortation, we do not hope for it with certainty, unless we have the support of other Armenians who, not long ago, with a similar exhortation and the shining example of the most blessed Archbishop John of Nicaea, proceeded nobly and excellently towards the return and restoration, and urged us to think more about your virtue." Letter 284, in [\*Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia\*](#), vol. 3, p.4 e., ed. B. Laourdas - L. Westerink (Bibliotheca Teubneriana).

11. Letter 2, [\*Encyclical Letter to the Hierarchal Thrones of the East\*](#), op. cit. 1, p. 41. Quote taken from (p. 296 The Orthodox Patristic Witness Concerning Catholicism)

12. Letter 139, To the Archon of Archons, P.G. 111, 365; R. Jenkins - L. Westerink, [\*Nicholas I, Patriarch of Constantinople, Letters\*](#), pp. 49-52.

13. [\*Arethae Archiepiscopi Caesariensis Scripta Minora\*](#), L. Westerink, Vol. I, Leipzig 1968, σελ. 52.

14. Protopresbyter Konstantinos Papadopoulos, "Relations of Saint Photius with the Armenian Church," *Synaxis*, issue 30, April - June 1989, p. 28.

15. B. Laourdas - L. Westerink, op. cit., Vol. 3, σελ. 98.

16. J. Darrouzes, «[\*Deux lettres inedites de Photius aux Armeniens\*](#)», *REB* 29(1971) 137-181.

17. Epistle 284, *Against the Theopaschite Heresy*, verses 422-425, op. cit., vol. 3, p. 15.

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